



# A LOOK AT EATING DISORDERS

Do you obsess over how much you eat and what you eat? Although it's certainly important to monitor our eating habits, being too focused on food can sometimes turn into an eating disorder. People with eating disorders have severe, persistent, and unhealthy thoughts and behaviors about food. As a result, they might eat way too little or way too much.

## NOT A CHOICE

Unlike dieting, eating disorders are not a lifestyle choice. They are serious illnesses. They affect your body's ability to get proper nutrition. This can lead to health issues, such as heart and kidney problems, or even death. The three most widely recognized eating disorders are binge-eating disorder, bulimia nervosa, and anorexia nervosa. Binge-eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the United States.

## BINGE-EATING

People with binge-eating disorder eat well beyond being full. They often eat until they feel very uncomfortable. Afterward, they're usually overcome by feelings of guilt, shame, and distress. Eating too much too often can lead to weight gain and can be associated with obesity.

## BULIMIA NERVOSA

When binge-eating is followed by "purging," it's called bulimia nervosa. People with bulimia nervosa may follow binge-eating by vomiting or taking laxatives to purge, over-exercising, or fasting. They're often able to maintain a normal weight because they compensate for the extra calories. But bulimia nervosa can cause other health issues, like heart irregularities or problems with the digestive system.

## ANOREXIA NERVOSA

People with anorexia nervosa are on the other extreme. They eat very little. They may see themselves as overweight, even when they are dangerously underweight. It's the least common of the three eating disorders, but is often the most deadly.

An eating disorder can develop for anyone, at any body weight or shape, and at any time. But they often start in the teen or young adult years.

## WHAT CAUSES AN EATING DISORDER?

What causes eating disorders isn't known. Genes and family history, mental and emotional health, and

environment and culture can all influence whether someone develops one of these complex conditions. Scientists continue to research reasons and treatments for these disorders.

Many people with eating disorders may not think they need treatment. So family members and friends can be very helpful. It's critical to express concern and to be there to listen for anyone who may have an eating disorder.

Treatment plans are tailored to individual needs. They may include talk therapy, nutritional counseling, and medications. With treatment, you can return to healthier eating habits and prevent serious complications.

*Source: <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2017/11/when-food-consumes-you>*

### SPOT THE SIGNS

There are signs you can look for that may indicate an eating disorder:

- » Skipping meals, making excuses for not eating, or eating in secret or separately.
- » Persistent worrying or talking about healthy eating, exercise, being overweight, or losing weight.
- » Eating much more food in a meal or snack than what's considered normal.
- » Eating large amounts of sweets or high-fat foods.
- » Leaving during meals to use the toilet.
- » Expressing depression, disgust, shame, or guilt about eating habits.
- » Frequently checking the mirror for perceived flaws.

